A Rascal in the ’60s Returns to the Road After Pandemic Enforced Hiatus

March 17, 2022 **by Dan McCue**

Felix Cavaliere

Looking back now, it all seems so guardedly optimistic.

With the coronavirus pandemic rapidly spreading across the United States during the winter of 2020, recording artists, concert venues, festival organizers and just about everybody else involved with the industry hoped the public health emergency would be a short-term crisis.

At first, mid-winter concert dates began to be rescheduled, then bigger tours — Billie Eilish and Céline Dion were both on the road at the time, among many others — began to press the pause button.

Within days a concert industry task force recommended that all "large-scale events through the end of March be postponed.

"We continue to support that small-scale events follow guidance set by their local government officials," they said.

Then things began to get grim.

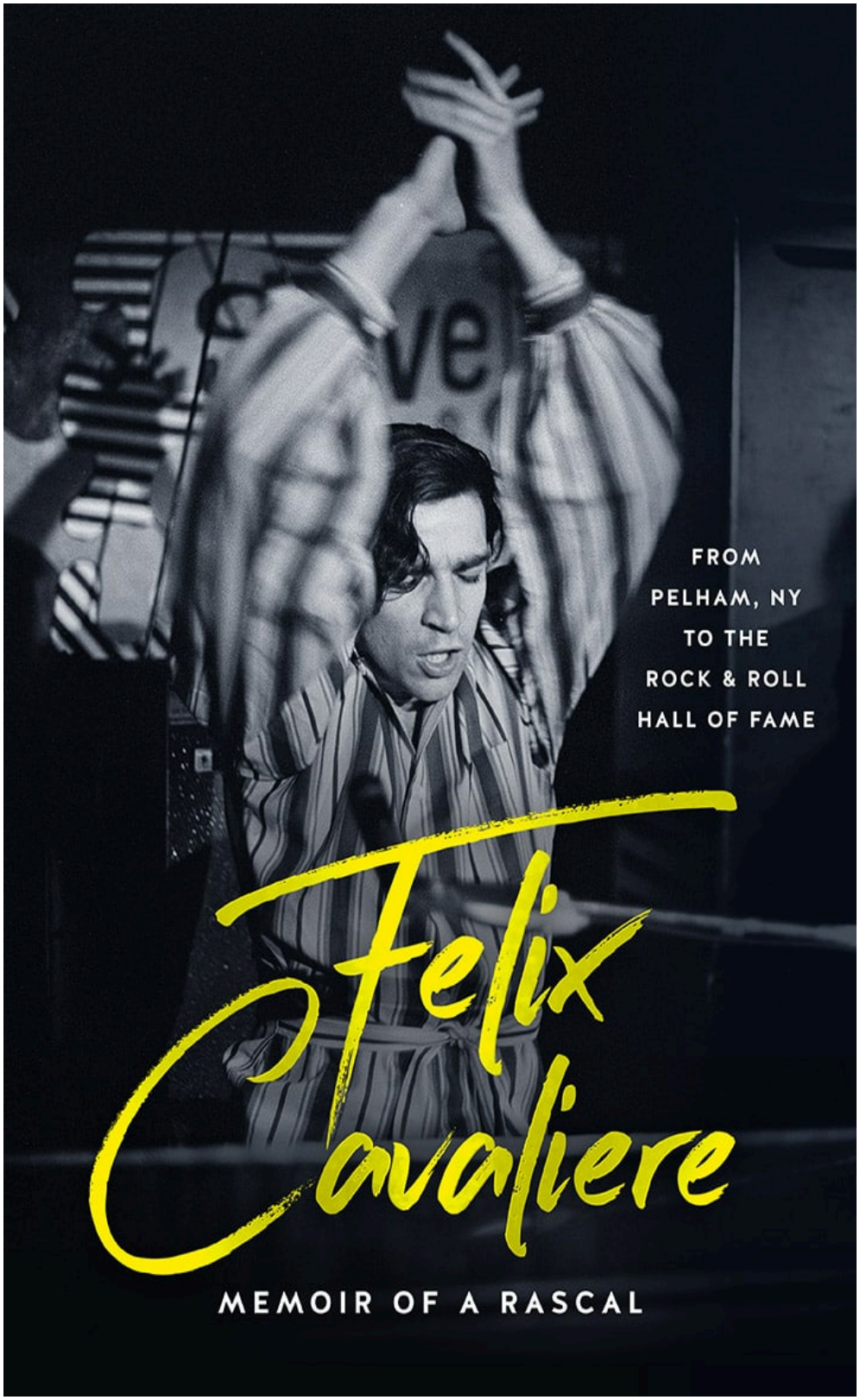
In early March, the annual South by Southwest festival was canceled, resulting, by some estimates, in a $27 million loss for the event's producers and a $350 million loss in associated economic impact for the city of Austin, Texas, where the festival is held.

Then the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and Stagecoach Festival, both held in California, the latter a country music heavy event, followed suit.

And by the time Live Nation Entertainment and AEG Presents, the two corporate giants in the concert industry, suspended all of their North American concert engagements, the industry was girding for what it still hoped would be a six-month shutdown.

Even then, the estimates were that half a year would cost the industry over $9.7 billion in ticket sales alone, with untold tens of

millions lost by the cities and towns that regularly play host to live events.



The cover of Felix Cavaliere's new memoir. (© 1967 Paul McCartney/Photographer Linda McCartney)

No one then knew the circus was stopped until further notice.

Two years later, the live concert business is beginning to look a lot like its old self again, and some are even estimating that by the end of 2022, live music will once again account for over 50% of the total revenues generated by the $50 billion global music industry.

Among those hitting the road this spring and more than happy to do so is Felix Cavaliere, one-time leader of the 1960s hit-makers The Young Rascals, later simply known as The Rascals.

For two solid years in the mid-1960s, Cavaliere and bandmates Eddie Brigati, Dino Danelli and Gene Cornish dominated the singles charts and, alongside the Righteous Brothers, defined a brand of rock 'n' roll music that soon became known as blue-eyed soul.

Beginning with the effervescent "Good Lovin'" in 1966, they scored nine top 20 hits over the next two years with songs like "Groovin'," "A Girl Like You," "How Can I Be Sure?" and "People Got to Be Free."

Cavaliere, who shared lead vocals with Brigati, sang on six of their biggest hits while also playing the Hammond B-3 organ.

Though the band broke up, seemingly for good, in 1972, intermittent reunions over the years have proven the band can still pack a punch when they care to, and it was no surprise when they were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997.

A native of Pelham, New York, a suburban town in Westchester County, approximately 10 miles northeast of Midtown Manhattan, Cavaliere now calls Nashville, Tennessee, home.

And it was the Music City that served as his refuge during the pandemic.

But, to paraphrase the title of one of his biggest hits, Cavaliere evidently feels he's been out of the limelight too long.

Not only does he have a new autobiography coming out, "Memoir of a Rascal" (currently available as a presale — with copies autographed by the man himself — at **FelixCavaliereMusic.com**), but he'll be playing the **Rams Head** in Annapolis, Maryland, on April 9 for what's being billed as "a full capacity show."

Beginning in late April and taking him at least into June is a tour with Micky Dolenz of The Monkees that will include stops in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts.

The Well News recently caught up with Cavaliere to talk about his life and career before, during and after the pandemic.

TWN: You live in Nashville, Tennessee, today. How did that happen?

FC: Simply put: Music. This is the Music City. There's no question about it. I was invited down to kind of take a look at a business someone had just started, and while I was here I ran into John Kay, from the band Steppenwolf. He was here. Then I ran into a couple of members of the E Street Band, Bruce Springsteen's guys, including Danny Federici, who is no longer with us.

So I kept asking the same question: What are you all doing down here? And they said, "If you want to be around musicians, this is the place."

And it certainly is.

TWN: It's no secret that the music business — particularly the concert and live performance side of it — took a huge wallop

during the coronavirus pandemic. In some ways, you were in the same boat as restaurant and other hospitality workers. Everything shut down. You have a show coming up April 9 at the Rams Head in Annapolis, Maryland. Is this the first, or one of the first, you've done since COVID-19 began to subside?

FC: We've done a few. A very few. But you are absolutely right. Musicians did take a big hit, but it wasn't only musicians. It was everybody associated with a performance … the people who set up the stage, the lighting people, the sound people, the travel people … all of those people took a big hit with us …

And you're right, restaurant workers were in a similar situation. Of course, some restaurants were able to do take-out to a degree and keep people working. And musicians were able to do Zoom shows … but it wasn't the same in either case. As for me personally, I was doing an album during this period and I was able to continue doing it because of computer technology.

But it was difficult. The thing about musicians is, for the most part, we're like horses … we want to get out of the barn and we want to run.

TWN: So what was it like for you when this thing first hit? I know in my case, covering government and politics in Washington, the District of Columbia went from busy to ghost town seemingly overnight. Everything shut down, and even today we're still talking about the future opening of the U.S. Capitol and the Supreme Court building and things like that. So what was the experience like for you?

FC: You know, it's interesting because not living in Washington, I didn't realize until just now the extent to which the city was shut down. But it was the same in Nashville. Everything shut down.

Everybody was afraid of catching it from somebody else — though some were not paying attention, which I don't understand.

And I remember the sense of really trying to figure out what your life was going to be. I mean, to begin with, musicians travel. And we love what we do.

And you have to because it's really difficult … just the travel part alone is difficult. With flight cancellations and all the other things that go along with it. At the same time, you have to remind yourself, it's much easier than taking a shovel to the backyard. So, no complaints.

The funny thing about musicians is they complain when they're traveling and they complain while they are home. But I know first hand and from a lot of people that I know, that the sudden inability to get out and work, was a very tough adjustment.

TWN: At the same time, I imagine, getting back out on the road and those first couple of shows was very difficult …

FC: It was kind of a combination of emotions. On the one hand, there was a kind of euphoria, but I think that was tempered with a little bit of trepidation.

What I sort of envision happening over the long term is that we'll experience something like what happened after the pandemic in the early years of the last century. We had the Roaring '20s, and I think we'll see a little bit of that, though it has been delayed now by the maniac in Russia. But I still think it's going to happen.

I still think people are anxious to let their hair down and rock 'n' roll and have a good time, and I think that because I've seen some evidence of it.

Now, to return to the sense of trepidation I mentioned. I did a show here in Nashville recently. And normally, people say, "Oh, man, can I get a ticket?" This time, that happened a lot less. One reason, of course, is my audience is a little older and they might have been a little nervous about coming into the show at that point.

Then there was the other part of the crowd that said, "What? You want me to take a test?" You know, "I'm free." "I'm a free man." And I certainly am not one to jump on people about their beliefs, but you do find yourself saying, "I sure hope you don't feel the same way about rabies or anything like that." Sorry, I got carried away.

TWN: No, I understand what you're saying. So, as you're getting more into performing again, who sets the rules? Is it the venue that decides, "Okay, we want people to wear face masks?" Or is it you, the artist, establishing ground rules? As in requiring everybody to be fully vaccinated?

FC: I don't personally set any rules because every state we play in has its own rules, and every club has its own rules. And even my manager has rules. He'll say, "I don't want you to do meet and greets anymore" or "I don't want you to shake anybody's hands." "I don't want you to hug anybody." And that's really hard because we've always had a close relationship with our audience.

Now, I know my manager is just being protective of me … because he thinks I'm old. So I just do what I'm told. Seriously.

TWN: Another thing that's happened in your life is you've got a new memoir out. Was this a COVID-19 project, to keep from going crazy during the lockdown, or had you been contemplating it for a while?

FC: I was working on it. I'll tell you what happened, briefly. We, meaning the original band, did a Broadway show in 2013 called

The Young Rascals in 1966. Standing in back: Dino Danelli. Sitting in front (L-R): Felix Cavaliere, Eddie Brigati and Gene Cornish

"Once Upon a Dream." And as we traveled from one city to another, we'd hold these press conferences and what I noticed was that everybody had a different answer to the same question. Every single one of us.

I mean, it got to the point where I'd say to myself, "You know, I could have sworn I was there." But more seriously, it really got me thinking about the idea of what is history? I hate to bring up

current affairs, but as we look at what's unfolding in Ukraine, where's the truth in that situation? And how do we know? Look what's happening with the Russian press. It's frightening.

If you are not a seeker, if you're not looking, then the truth is what you've been told. Period. And that's pretty scary, man. Of course, that's a whole other subject. But it is what inspired me to write this book. I'd walk out of one of these press conferences [with my fellow Rascals] and say to myself, "I could have sworn," and eventually I accepted everybody has their own perspective on events and things that took place and I could say, "Well, okay … but I just want to get my thoughts down."

Still, it begs the question, what is history? Is history merely the version of the story told by the last person standing? Or is merely the version you choose to believe in? I mean, that's the problem we're dealing with right now in America, isn't it?

And then you look at something as simple as a press conference by a band and people asking, "Well, how did you get your name?" or "How did the band get started?" And you'd think, well heck, there's only one story about that, isn't there? Nope.

TWN: Okay, that brings up an interesting point. Like you, I grew up in the New York metropolitan area. I also happened to have begun my writing career writing about music on Long Island, and the story that was already being passed down at that point was, The Rascals were the foundation of the Long Island music scene. And then came all these other people, from Vanilla Fudge to Billy Joel to Eddie Money and so on. The thing is, none of The Rascals is from Long Island …

FC: If Long Island wants to claim us, that's okay by me. [Laughs]. It's kind of like my relationship with Hawaii. We're not from there either, but we were huge in Hawaii.

At the same time, there is some truth to that claim. We got discovered while playing on Long Island. We were discovered while playing at a club called The Barge in the Hamptons.

What happened was, we had literally just formed the band, maybe five months before, and we had worked at a couple of clubs in New Jersey. Then all of a sudden, this gentleman who had a very famous discotheque in New York City called Ondine asks us, "Would you like to be the house band in this new place I'm opening up in the Hamptons?"

Since you're from around there, you're aware of what the Hamptons is, it's M-O-N-E-Y. It's a summer playground for the well-to-do and people with important connections in all kinds of businesses. So I knew if we were able to go out there and make an impression, somebody was going to see us and we'd be on our way. And that's exactly what happened.

TWN: Do you have any particularly vivid memories attached to that summer?

FC: Only that it was fun, you know. It was summer. We were playing a club on the water. We were young kids, so there wasn't a lot of pressure on us. It was great.

TWN: Of course, you also played other places on Long Island. … I believe one that was later popular with national touring acts was the Action House in Island Park …

FC: Oh yeah. The Action House. They named that place so well.

TWN: What I'm getting at is, was there a circuit for young bands to play back then, the early to mid-1960s?

FC: Well, I'd say it was a time of transformation. Funnily enough, I'm going to be playing out in Patchogue, Long Island, in a few

weeks and Patchogue was the site of one of our first shows, after we'd started recording. We played at Patchogue High School. We played at a high school in Great Neck because [Atlantic Records producer] Jerry Wexler's daughter went to school there.

The reality was there really was no place to work, at least not consistently. Rock 'n' roll was still a burgeoning, new thing. I mean, for lack of a better space, one place we used to play was in movie theaters. And then the hope would be that you'd become popular enough to play a small theater.

Many years later, I was living in Hartford, Connecticut, and I ran into John Mellencamp, who said, "You know, we've got it made compared to what you guys had to play in." And he was right. I mean, I remember playing in a venue that had played host to a rodeo prior to us … and the odor was unbelievable. But that was what it was in those days.

TWN: At about the same time though, or maybe, chronologically speaking, one followed the other, you also played the big package shows put on by people like Murray the K, the legendary New York disc jockey …

FC: One thing did lead to the other. And these package shows you're talking about, I guess can be seen as kind of an era unto themselves. You had these disc jockeys like Alan Freed and Murray the K and Clay Cole, and they would present these concerts with five or six great, chart-topping acts on the bill.

Like you'd have us on the same bill as The Who and Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels and Wilson Pickett and The Blues Project, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, and Simon and Garfunkel. And you got to see all these acts for $3.50 a ticket. But those days came to a quick end. If you tried to do something like that today, you'd have to charge $1,000 a ticket.

TWN: But in terms of the timing and your career?

FC: I'd say probably the middle of this package show era coincided with the beginning of our career.

TWN: People today, I think, forget how big disc jockeys were in those days. I mean, they were stars in their own right. Certainly Murray the K was. What was he like?

The famed New York City Disc Jockey Murray the K Kaufman with one if his most successful discoveries, the Ronettes. (Wikimedia Commons)

FC: He was cool. I used to go to the Jets games with him. People in those days — and I'm still very friendly with Cousin Brucie, who was another one of those huge disc jockeys — had personalities. You tuned into those big AM stations because they had personalities. They had a shtick, they had a way about them. Number two, for the most part, they were responsible for what they played … and that's a lost art now. It's all corporate now.

For example, back in the day, we'd go to New Orleans and what you'd hear was New Orleans music, or you would go to California,

and it'd be California music. Midwest, same thing. Now it's all homogenized. It's all corporate.

And it really goes back to the Clinton administration and the deregulation of the telecommunications industry, where they decided, for some reason, to allow people to buy more than one radio and TV station in a market. And that opened the door to total corporate saturation.

TWN: Okay, so in the time when you're really starting to get big with "Good Lovin'," "Groovin'," "A Girl Like You," and so on, are you being influenced by those disc jockeys at all? Is their excitement being reflected in the excitement you're trying to generate? Is their taste reflected in how and what you wrote?

FC: Well, you know, on a certain level … Well, let me answer it this way: You had to be mindful of writing for the radio because in those days they had certain rules, especially with AM. They had time concerns, so you had to make sure that the record was within a certain amount of time.

TWN: The proverbial three-minute single …

FC: Right. So what started happening was you'd start to record an "album version" of a song because it was just too long to get on the radio, and then we had to chop it down, cut it down to create the single version.

That's what we did with "I've Been Lonely Too Long." We had an album version that was considered too long for AM radio and then we had to cut it down.

And then, slowly, that changed. Part of that was due to the advent of FM radio, which expanded the idea of what was acceptable. But it was also due to the tremendous contributions of artists like Bob

Dylan, who put out "Like a Rolling Stone," which was over six minutes long, and blew all the rules to hell with that one.

That's the spirit that we had in those days. Let's knock down some of these walls and make new ones.

TWN: If I can circle back to my original question, though. When one reads about this era — I mean countless performers and people in the industry have put out memoirs about those days — and rarely do the radio people get mentioned. And somehow I find that odd. I mean, especially going back to the '60s and '70s, recording artists didn't have all that many venues to be seen and heard … and if a listener heard you interviewed, it was on the local station. I don't know, it just strikes me as odd that those people, with rare exceptions, get left out of the history … again, we're talking about history …

But I'll give you an example. Elton John wrote an autobiography a few years back. I know from growing up in New York that he visited a certain radio station constantly, was close friends with several of its on-air personalities and even, reputedly, regularly walked off with records from the station's record library … and yet, not a whisper about any of that in those pages …

Now that I've digressed, I guess I should make note of the fact that Bruce Morrow — Cousin Brucie from the old WABC and WCBS in New York — wrote the intro for your book. So … I guess I should say, "Well played" …

FC: I was just going to say, "But I've got Cousin Brucie in my book." Cousin Brucie is … well, there's a word for people like him, he's a mensch. We've known him forever, it seems like, and I don't know if I actually have the story in the book, but he really was a mentor to me and to us as The Rascals were getting well known.

Like I said before, once we got together as a band and realized we had something, we got it into our heads that we needed to be discovered by somebody important. Okay, so who are we going to get? So we decided, let's just go into the city, to WABC, grab Brucie and bring him over to the nightclub. Let him hear us. He'll love us. And we walk into the station and he's six-foot-three. [Laughs].

The Beatles at Shea Stadium (Wikimedia Commons)

So there was no way, even with four of us, that we were going to hustle him off to the nightclub. It was more like, "Um, hi Mr. Morrow … we were wondering if we could borrow you for a little while." But he's been a friend ever since that day. He played our music. He was friendly with our manager, Sid Bernstein. There were relationships in those days and those relationships were important.

I mean, disc jockeys around the country would come to your shows and they'd like what you were doing and go out of their way to help

you — maybe they'd play your record the next day or talk about the show.

And there was a time when the promoters actually showed up at the shows they were presenting, because they genuinely loved the music. I've got a friend out in Phoenix, [Arizona], Danny Zelisko, who is one of those promoters to this day. That's virtually unheard of.

I'm probably talking too much, but what happened was there came a day when suddenly the people who came to the shows were the accountants … chasing their love of numbers.

TWN: I know what you mean. And it did change. Back when you were regularly having hit records, someone would turn on their transistor radio and hear a Dan Ingram or a Ron Lundy introducing a new record and even if you hadn't heard it before that moment, you were excited about it because they were excited about it …

FC: You got it, man … and what it came down to was personality. And sadly I don't think there's any room for that anymore. But that's a shame because these were interesting people. I mean, I can remember going around the city with Murray the K when he was married to Jackie Hayes, who was a big actress on one of those daytime shows.

And it was an example of the focus of the media having changed because just a few years earlier, Murray was everywhere. And suddenly, we would go out in public together, and everyone knew her and nobody knew him. It's interesting how those things happen.

But let me give you an exception to what seems to be the rule. After I moved to Nashville — actually, it was to Franklin, Tennessee, right

outside of Nashville — this gentleman moved across the street from me named Bob Carlisle and we got to be friends. Our children are all about the same age, that kind of thing.

So as I get to know him I find out that he's a Christian recording artist and that he was also the voice of one of the Ninja Turtles, which I thought was funny.

Then one day he comes over and says, "Can you do me a favor and listen to this song I've written? My wife wants me to put it on my next album, and I'm thinking about it, but I just don't know. I don't know if it fits with what I do." So I say sure, I go over to his house and he plays me the song and I immediately burst into tears.

The song is called "Butterfly Kisses" and he wrote it for his daughter on her 16th birthday. So what happens is, he puts it on his next album, again, it's a Christian album, and this disc jockey down in Florida starts playing the song, on Mother's Day.

The next thing you know, it's a million seller and racing up the charts. I mean, the guy basically can retire because of that one song. And it's all because a disc jockey was moved by it. And that really doesn't happen anymore. Not because people are different, but because the industry has changed.

TWN: Speaking of "the industry," do you get involved in producing or recording sessions work being in Nashville?

FC: I was pretty involved prior to COVID, but I don't really play a lot of people's sessions because it's a different kind of musician who does that. In a session situation you have got to do what you are told. I'm not very good at that. I have too many ideas for that.

But I love being part of the songwriting community down here, and that's really why I'm here. It is wonderful to have very few barriers

between you and the person you want to write with. It's a very open city in that regard.

TWN: Okay, now we've been talking about your early career, and I want to go back to a name you mentioned. Sid Bernstein. A fascinating character in the annals of rock music.

To our readers, I should explain that Sid Bernstein was a local promoter and talent manager in New York who was also something of an Anglophile and religiously read the British music press.

As a result, he got a leg up on everybody else and was the promoter who initially brought not only The Beatles, but also The Rolling Stones, Herman's Hermits, the Moody Blues and others over to America.

And he was also the first person to organize rock concerts in sports stadiums … so how did you hook up with him?

FC: This is when our being discovered actually happens. We were playing out at The Barge in the Hamptons, and this businessman named Walter Harmon was vacationing out there. He was a textile man. And he happened to see us and saw potential.

So what does he do? He decides to call up his buddy, Sid Bernstein, and says, I think I've seen a group that you might be interested in. Bernstein comes out to the Hamptons, catches our show and decides he's our manager. First thing he makes happen — our salary at The Barge doubles. Because up to that point, we'd really been taken advantage of. Then [he] started getting the publicity apparatus going.

In those days, of course, there was no social media — there wasn't even any internet — so the people you turned to if you wanted to publicize your band were the newspaper columnists who covered

entertainment. For example, Ed Sullivan was a columnist before he became a famous television show host.

So if you wanted to get publicity, you went to the entertainment section of the newspapers and tried to interest them in whatever you were promoting. In our case, Sid Bernstein started calling the columnists and we immediately started getting offers from record companies.

Now, on his end of the spectrum, during this same period, he had brought The Beatles on their first trip to America, they performed on "The Ed Sullivan Show" and I think they might have also played Carnegie Hall in New York during that visit.

And he was now organizing their second trip to the United States, which is when he brought them over to perform at Shea Stadium, in Queens.

At this point, The Rascals are still fledglings.

TWN: But that Beatles show at Shea Stadium plays a significant role in the legend of The Rascals, does it not?

FC: It does, but this is another example of a story that has changed over the years, thanks to people's shaky recollections. I meet people all the time that ask, "What was it like to open for The Beatles at Shea Stadium?" or say definitively, "I remember when you opened for The Beatles at Shea Stadium."

That didn't happen. We didn't open for The Beatles at Shea Stadium. What did happen was, Sid Bernstein was a publicist at heart. He could get you excited about a topic just by talking about it.

So right before The Beatles go on, he has a message go up on the scoreboard. It says, "The Rascals are coming. The Rascals are coming. The Rascals are coming." And Brian Epstein, The Beatles'

manager, has a fit. He says, "If that advertisement is not gone by the time I finish this sentence, there will be no show."

TWN: How did you hear about what had happened?

FC: Well we were at the show as fans. Because of our connection to Sid, we were watching from the dugout … so we were right there when we saw our name go up on the scoreboard and when The Beatles, a few minutes later, walked out onto the field and took the stage.

And it was wild, really wild. The whole place was screaming, people were screaming their head's off … and as for The Beatles themselves … I had seen them for the first time in a little club in Germany … and the one thing that hadn't changed was this power that they had, it was just amazing.

TWN: I assume you watched the recent "Get Back," director Peter Jackson's reimagining of all the footage Michael Lindsay-Hogg shot for the original "Let It Be" documentary on the band …

FC: I watched some of it, but I get a little sad when I see shows like that. A lot of memories, you know?

TWN: The one thing that's inescapable, even from a sampling, is how The Beatles were creating songs at that point. Basically coming in with a fragment of an idea and banging it out. Is what we saw of their creative process in any way similar to yours back then, when you were topping the charts with things like "Groovin'" and "It's a Beautiful Morning" and "How Can I Be Sure"?

FC: The short answer is no. We didn't work like that. And The Beatles probably didn't work quite like that in the beginning either. That was probably something that developed over time, when Paul

McCartney and John Lennon were writing more on their own, rather than as collaborators.

So what you saw was mostly Paul, but also John, coming in and contributing their songs and ideas for songs.

What usually happens in a band is there are some people who are really prolific — the workaholics — and other people who are just more interested in how long or short the skirts are in the audience.

As for me, I always enjoyed what I did. I used to go home and write, write, write, write, write, write … and then I would bring the songs around. … Typically, that started with my bringing them to Eddie [Brigati], [the co-lead singer and percussionist in The Rascals], because I always felt Eddie had a nicer, sweeter tone to his lyrics than I did.

Before the pandemic. Felix Cavaliere on stage in Scottsdale, Arizona on 2019. (Photo by Leon Volskis)

So I would bring my songs to him, and then kind of wait for him to get back to work.

TWN: You wrote on the keyboard?

FC: The piano, yes. And it's because you didn't even really have much to document your work with. We had these little tape recorders to record things with, but if you forgot to turn it on, something really good could be gone with the wind.

In my case, I usually started with a melody and a rhythm, figuring out the chords, and then later, I'd try to put a title to it. If I was working on something and liked it, I would probably do it again the next day. Which, of course, is another way to ensure you didn't forget something you liked.

Once I put a title to something, the next step, most of the time, was to work on a lyric for the chorus, and then I would kind of go back and fill in the verses.

It was at that point that I'd take something to Eddie because he was more flowery, in a sense, and I was more serious. And it started off as a really nice relationship. We were a good team.

TWN: Speaking of the seriousness of some of the themes you tackled, I understand "People Got To Be Free," a song that has renewed relevance in light of the war in Ukraine, was originally written with the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, D-N.Y., in mind?

FC: Being in Washington I'm sure you know a lot of people involved in campaigns or who have been involved in campaigns, and I'm sure you've also seen people run for office who inspire a kind of avid degree of support.

Well, for me, one person that inspired that feeling was Bobby Kennedy. I really believed that the Kennedy family, and Robert

Kennedy in particular, was going to really help change our planet a little bit.

Anyway, I was working for his presidential campaign in 1968, and I was dating a woman at the time who was at the assassination. She was actually there on that horrible evening in the hotel. One minute, she's celebrating the fact he won the California primary; the next, it's total devastation.

And it just freaked me out. Completely. I mean, I was like any other campaign worker that night. You've been involved. You've worked hard for something you believe in. And you get this fever. You see the momentum shifting to your candidate and it's like, "Oh wow." Then you win the primary and again, it's "Oh wow." And then suddenly it's "What?" "He was shot?" "He was killed?"

Just to have that range of emotions in such a short period of time. I mean, there is no other way to describe it than to say, it just blew my mind. I know a lot of people who were really crying and saddened … and I was one of them.

And as the hours passed I went from emotion to emotion, and at some point just got really ticked off … and I finally said to myself, "I've got to do something. I've got to say something. I've got to put these thoughts I'm having to music." I mean, that's what musicians and songwriters do. And that is how "People Got To Be Free" came about.

TWN: And it was one of those songs that not only captured the mood of the country at that time, it also really bridged the divide that was already developing between AM and FM radio during that same period.

I mean, we're talking about late 1968, and FM rock radio had only really been around since the summer of 1966 and didn't

start coming into its own until the fall of 1967 … and a lot of your contemporaries were being left behind as FM stations and the disc jockeys employed embraced The Doors and Jimi Hendrix and so on.

"People Got to Be Free" really helped you make the transition to what might be called an "FM band."

FC: When I put together that band, my theory was, I'm going to get the best darned guys I can find, the best players I can find, the best singers I can find, and you know … we had a good band, man. I mean, we could play anything. Seriously.

There's a passage in the book that John Sebastian put in there. And I love him. He's one of my dearest friends today, but back then, when I was in The Rascals and he was in The Lovin' Spoonful, we were rivals.

And what he says in the book is, one night he and Zalman Yanovsky, his lead guitar player, came to see us and when they got home that night, they said, "We better start practicing." Because we at that point were a badass group.

We had four guys in one band who could all be leaders of their own bands. Our drummer, Dino Danelli, was on another planet when he played. He was putting on a show all by himself. And every member was that strong in his own right. So the fact that we had staying power and could make that transition didn't surprise me. It's just unfortunate that, like they say at the end of any relationship, business or personal: It's just a shame the last part wasn't as good as the beginning.

TWN: Okay, now I know you guys went your separate ways in the early 1970s, but I also happened to be in Madison Square Garden in New York when The Rascals got back together, with

all the original members, for the Atlantic Records 40th Anniversary Concert.

At that point you hadn't played together for something like 16 years, and yet you guys were one of the highlights of a show that featured dozens of acts, including the Bee Gees and Genesis and Yes and a reunited Led Zeppelin …

FC: That was the plan. I mean, it sounds funny to say it that way, but I refer to it as kind of a basketball team mentality. You get all these old stars, put them together, and a certain chemistry ignites.

It doesn't mean they're going to win. You've still got to throw the ball and pass the ball to each other … but when it happens, it's just like magic. If you can just get the guys doing it again, it's going to be special. That's what happened that night for us. And it was the same when we later came together again for our Broadway show "Once Upon a Dream."

There's just a magic to a group that you can't put your finger on. Individually, each person might not be a virtuoso, but together it works and there's no doubt in my mind that that's a divine occurrence. It just doesn't happen by chance.

I mean, the time we played together, which was in my father's basement, we knew we had something.

TWN: So what happens to bands? Why do they inevitably fall apart?

FC: You know, I studied for many years with a guru … and this is in the book and I think this is probably the most important message that I want to get across in it. Yoga teaching is not a religion. Instead, what it points out is that the real enemy in life is called ego. That's the real enemy. And it's not only in rock 'n' roll bands.

And I think one manifestation of that is people who think they know everything and don't need anybody's advice. I think that's what we're witnessing over in Russia right now. That's a manifestation of ego. That's the ego, that's the enemy … and that's basically what yoga teaches human beings to control, if not defeat.

TWN: Okay, so perfect example. That performance that night. You're Broadway show, which was produced by Steven Van Zandt and his wife Maureen and later became a successful tour. How do you control the ego enough to bring those things to fruition?

FC: I work pretty hard at it. I work pretty hard. I can't speak for other people, but I work pretty hard to keep myself in check.

The person I studied with received some kind of recognition from the United Nations not long ago, and I remember watching that and thinking about what a humble man he is. I looked at that and said, "That's what he's trying to teach us, that humility … and that kind of respect for others." And it's not difficult. It just takes some practice.

It's easy to fall into the trap of saying, "How come he's on camera?" or "They're in the spotlight," but you have to fight those feelings, and the more you do, the more you feel like a selfless soul.

TWN: Before we wrap this up, let me completely switch gears on you. We started out talking about your experience as a musician restarting his career after a global pandemic. So I want to mention that not only are you doing your own shows, but come summer, you're also going to be undertaking a pretty lengthy tour with Micky Dolenz of The Monkees.

FC: This is true, we're going to be performing separate sets, but intermingling for at least one song together during each of our sets.

Micky's a really funny guy, God bless him. It's hard to keep a straight face when he's around.

I'm really looking forward to the tour. I think it'll work because their music was happy and my music is happy. And that's kind of what we need right now, so I say let it rock.

TWN: A question just popped into my mind. And forgive me, it's kind of dumb. Years ago there was a controversy involving the lyrics to "Groovin.'" Well, maybe not a controversy, but a discussion about the lyrics … and I'm sure you know where I'm going with this. To me it sounds like, as you're heading into the chorus, you sing, "You and me endlessly." But some have said you were singing something a little more suggestive: "You and me and Leslie." I can't believe I'm asking, but, which is it?

FC: [Laughs]. It's "endlessly." And just an example of my lack of diction. The one I've always been entertained by is people claiming Jimi Hendrix sings, "'Scuse me while I kiss this guy" on "Purple Haze."

There's actually a **book** out there, came out a few years ago, that's kind of a **collection** of misheard song lyrics. It's kind of a tribute to bad rock star diction.

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